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SUBJECT: The Cost of Immunity

#### SUMMARY

**¶1.** (SBU) On July 17, President Wade asserted his authority when he instructed the Prime Minister to deliver a message to the National Assembly in which he promised to purchase a vehicle for each one of the 150 Deputies, detailed reforms the Deputies needed to undertake, and instructed them how to formulate their oral questions to members of the cabinet. With the major organs of government docile, Wade is in position to pave the way for a successor who can guarantee him immunity and continue his vision. The resurrection of the Senate is another nail in the coffin of the Assembly. The opposition, labor unions and Judiciary remain weak. End Summary.

#### AN ASSEMBLY WITHOUT CREDIBILITY

**¶2.** (SBU) In early June, a historically low 36 percent of Senegalese elected a new National Assembly. The low turnout is being interpreted as a rejection of the Assembly by voters who see the Deputies as puppets of the Executive. A lack of checks and balances, a phenomenon not new in Senegalese politics, has been reinforced during Wade's tenure, wherein powers are concentrated in the Presidency. In the eyes of many Senegalese, the current National Assembly lacks legitimacy and relevancy. While one-third of registered voters voted, this overall figure cloaks much lower rates of turnout in many areas. Lacking a true popular mandate, the Assembly risks becoming a mere annex of the ruling party and tool in the battle between those who may want to eventually succeed Wade.

#### A SENATE OF YES-MEN

**¶3.** (SBU) On August 19, members of the National Assembly and local government officials will elect 35 members of the new 100 person Senate (Note: the remainder will be appointed by Wade). The main opposition parties have boycotted these elections as well, labeling them an electoral farce. In reality, the election has become a PDS affair and the nomination process within the ruling party has already ignited a fierce battle among local PDS leaders. For example, for one seat in the Department of Pikine there are 90 candidates. This pattern is being repeated around the country and will force Wade to arbitrate the selection process. Although the Senate will be wholly composed of PDS members, it is important to note that in the event of a vacancy in the Presidency, it is the President of the Senate who, for 90 days, will become President ad interim; this means that Wade can, in effect, pre-position his successor should he step down before the next Presidential election.

#### CONTAINING THE OPPOSITION

**¶4.** (SBU) In this new paradigm of a discredited legislature, the question of his succession, and amidst a turbulent social and economic climate, Wade is showing signs of flexibility. While he has so far refused to dialogue with opposition leaders, who continue their boycott and threaten to resort to aggressive measures, the

fact that the people heeded their call for a boycott of legislative elections shows that they may be in a position to exploit the current frustrations surrounding the high cost of living and the energy crisis. To be able to govern peacefully, Wade seems to have realized that a change of strategy is needed. On July 25 he held talks with Senegal's largest opposition party, Rewmi of former Prime Minister Idrissa Seck. He blamed Seck's entourage for the misunderstanding between the two and indicated his willingness to reunite with Seck. In the same vein, he held discussions with Landing Savane, who recently wrote Wade a letter underlining his desire to have his party resume its coalition with the PDS.

Comment

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15. (SBU) With a malleable legislature and a judiciary under his tutelage, Wade controls Senegal's political future. His goal seems to be to organize a legal succession (not necessarily via elections) that will be accepted as a fait accompli by the two other branches of government. A carefully chosen successor would presumably guarantee him and his family immunity and maintain his liberal followers in power. However, manipulating institutions and laws may well have implications for political stability. The President will also have to placate the key players within his own extended political family. This may require additional cabinet changes and a redistribution of power, further discrediting political actors and deepening the distrust between the population and their political leaders. End Comment.

SMITH